



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

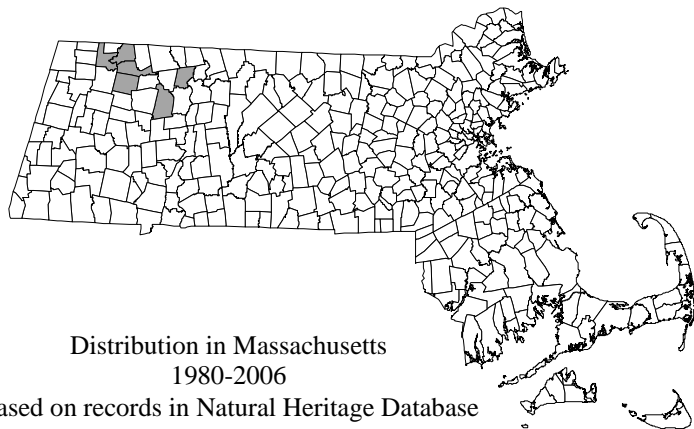
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
Route 135, Westborough, MA 01581

www.nhesp.org

Description: Three birds orchid (*Triphora trianthophora*) is a delicate perennial of the Orchidaceae family. This small and inconspicuous plant forms colonies by stolons (horizontal, above-ground stems), often hidden in leaf-litter. White to pink flowers open for only one or two days each August, and in some years may not emerge from the ground at all. Like many orchids, it is thought to depend upon a symbiotic relationship with soil fungi. In Massachusetts, this tiny plant often grows in shallow depressions of beech-filled woodlands on slopes and in ravines. It is usually associated with beech elsewhere in New England as well.

Aids to identification: This plant is most often found in colonies of clustered stems. Each stem usually bears three (sometimes more) white to pink flowers which, at maturity, nod from the axils of leaf-like bracts near the top of the stems, resembling small birds. The labellum (lowest, "lip" petal) of each flower has three green to yellow, raised ridges.

Similar species: This species is quite distinct from the other orchids of mesic woodland habitats. The combination of its 1) colonial nature, 2) relatively unspecialized labellum which does not form a pouch, sac, or spur as in many orchids, and 3) small, alternate, ovate, clasping leaves serves to distinguish this from other small woodland orchids.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1980-2006

Based on records in Natural Heritage Database

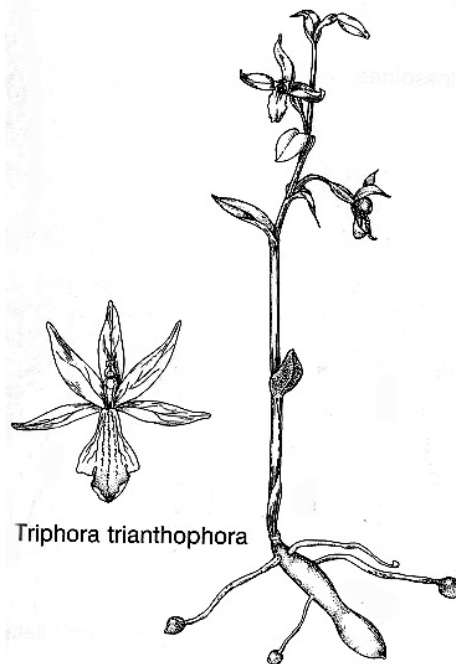
Three Birds Orchid

(Nodding Pogonia)

Triphora trianthophora

State Status: **Endangered**

Federal Status: None



Triphora trianthophora

Holmgren, N. 1998. The Illustrated Companion to Gleason and Cronquist's Manual. New York Botanical Garden.

Habitat: Three birds orchid grows in sloping, mesic, mixed hardwood forests, usually beech-dominated, in deep pockets or hollows with accumulated leaf litter and deep humus. It is usually found with very few herbaceous associates. Light is usually filtered through a moderately open canopy. Soil pH does not seem to be an important factor for this species.

Population status in Massachusetts: The three birds orchid is listed as "Endangered" by the Commonwealth. It is also considered to be rare throughout the New England region. In Massachusetts it is known from six current stations and one historical station (not documented within the past 25 years). As with all species listed in Massachusetts, individuals of the species are protected from take (picking, collecting, killing) or sale under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act.

Threats: The supporting upland, wooded habitat of this species is threat from conversion to residential or other types of development. Ill-timed or heavy timber harvest, or removal of leaf litter would also be detrimental to the three birds orchid.

Range: This orchid is found from Maine west to Wisconsin, south to Florida and Texas.

Management Recommendations: Little is known about the specific requirements of this small orchid; however, relationships with soil fungi within the woodland community are thought to be important. As such, maintaining the intact surrounding habitat with as little human disturbance as possible is the primary management goal. Because orchid propagation and reintroductions are notoriously difficult, reintroduction may not be feasible, at least until extensive research is conducted to elucidate the complex relationships this plant may have with soil organisms, pollinators, and other plants.

Flowers Present

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Originated: 2006